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# THE FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES.

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VENEZUELA.

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WHOLESOME criticism of the Diplomatic and Consular Service of the United States, which for several years has been growing in vigor and volume, has recently shown an unfortunate tendency to degenerate into unintelligent and unjust attack upon a body of public officials which is not without very considerable merit.

In considering some of the harsh judgments passed upon the officials of the United States engaged in its foreign service, I shall refer more particularly to the Consuls. To attack them in a sweeping, indiscriminating way, has come to be almost a habit with many Americans who travel abroad and with business men who feel the need of foreign markets, but who are too inactive, too ill-informed or too stupid to take advantage of the opportunities for increasing export trade which the Government is persistently setting before the people of the United States. Business men who fail in the foreign markets become very severe critics of the United States Consul, and their chorus of detraction is often swelled by those who work loyally and untiringly to secure the extension of the merit system to our foreign service.

According to the public press, it has recently been asserted in an address or lecture by a former Assistant Cabinet Officer, that "our Diplomatic Service is a disgrace," and we are almost daily informed that our Consular Service is "the worst in the world." The latter assertion, indeed, may be said to be the burden of the complaining song of those who assail our Consular system without adequate knowledge of the efficiency of foreign consuls, and the systems under which they work.

One cannot defend what is known as our "Consular System"

as it exists to-day, but surely there is much to be said for the results that have been achieved, in spite of the faults of the system itself. No objection can be made to well considered criticism, and it takes no gift of uncommon or profound penetration to discover the weak places in our system. Happily for the country, however, they are mainly on the surface and, for that reason, are more readily discovered, and may be more easily corrected.

The salient fault of the preponderating mode of criticism of our Foreign Service is that it is not discriminating, is not founded upon comprehensive, accurate knowledge, and in most cases, is neither precise nor specific. The parrot cry, "We have the worst consular system in the world," has gained currency, credence and authority by the irresistible force of reiteration. It is a slashing, ill-considered phrase, and one that is misleading and confusing.

A considerable portion of the condemnation of the consular service is based on the social shortcomings of many of our consuls and their lack of familiarity with many of the conventional proprieties. In the south of France I was once invited with the officers of one of our men of war, to dine with the Prefect of the department. This important representative official was a man of ancient and illustrious family. He was cultured, rich and refined in manner and talk. He was also an accomplished linguist and spoke English correctly and fluently. In short, he was a many-sided man who deserved and commanded respect. Shortly after we had taken our seat at the table, and while the delicious, delicately seasoned *potage* was being eaten, there was a lull for a few seconds in the conversation, and the loud, drawling voice of the American Consul was heard exclaiming, with great earnestness: "By thunder, Mr. Prefect, this is bully soup." Of course, the Consul's fellow-countrymen present were sorry and chagrined, yet the expression of robust satisfaction was so genuine, so obviously just, so innocently uttered, so pregnant with good faith and profound conviction, that I think our host was not displeased. This consul was a child of nature; he was quite unfamiliar with some of the small refinements and conventions of cosmopolitan society, but he was intelligent, alert, honest, careful and kind-hearted. He was the possessor of a splendid physique, was endowed with much personal magnetism, and was bristling with Americanism. He had had practical experience in many walks of life. Nine per-

sons in ten who saw this consul at the Prefect's dinner-table would declare that he was unfit for the official position which he held; but it should be remembered that such incidents do not illustrate the fitness or unfitness of a Consular Officer for the serious business of the service. It would be a great deal better, and far more soothing to our pride, if all our Consuls were accomplished men of the world, as well as capable, industrious, honest commercial agents of the Government; but it is vain to expect too much at once, especially at this stage of our development. The Consul to whom I have referred was a very efficient officer. The Department of State thought extremely well of him. He was a shrewd observer; he saw and reported with graphic felicity many fresh, pertinent and important facts in the field of foreign commerce and manufactures; his reports pointed the way and opened the doors to new markets for the products of many American factories. At the end of two years, he had acquired the language of the country to which he was accredited, and at the end of four years he was turned out of office just when his usefulness to his own country was greatest. This is a real case, and it is a typical one. It proves many things. One is that the tenure of office should be longer; it does not prove, however, that it should be for life, as many advocates of Consular Reform suggest.

To those of us who have had practical, personal knowledge of our foreign service, who have been Consular officers, who have a keen sense of the imperfections of our Consular System and who know something at the same time of its splendid possibilities, the idea of permanent, uninterrupted service abroad has never seemed a satisfactory corrective for the present ills. There is a danger that long residence abroad would unfit many men for the work of accurately and ably representing the business interests of their own country. My own observation, and it is one that I share with a great many men who have been employed in the Foreign Service of the United States, is that most consuls who have lived abroad for a long period unconsciously drift away from the distinctive sentiment, thought and purposes of the United States. They lose touch with their countrymen, and they are certainly very much less American in their ideas and activities than when they entered the service; and I here use the word "American" in its best and highest sense. Consuls who live ten or a dozen years abroad without returning, except for an occasional, very

brief visit, to the United States, lose the individuality which appertains to their national character and insensibly merge into their foreign environment. They develop an excess of mental adaptability, they harmonize too serenely and completely with their surroundings. They gain polish and culture, but lose all ambition, save the ambition to live abroad. Too often they become severe, habitual critics of their own country. Our tariff legislation gives them pain, for the reason that it is unpopular abroad, annoys their foreign friends and, in some cases, causes them financial loss. The attitude toward his own country of the Consul who has been a long time abroad is frequently one of apology both for that country and its people. When a Consular or Diplomatic Officer reaches this condition of development or degeneracy, his usefulness as a public functionary ceases. He is no longer a true and efficient representative of his country. We have no reason to send abroad salaried apologists. We want the men in our foreign service to represent the good will and good breeding of their country, but we cannot afford to keep our Consulates filled with men who succumb too readily to the blandishments and influences of their foreign surroundings. When a man in our Foreign Service begins to think that he must habitually and servilely defer to the opinions and wishes of the people among whom he happens to be living, he is no doubt successfully flattering the people about him, but he is also winning and meriting their concealed contempt, and is woefully misrepresenting his countrymen. We must be represented abroad by Americans, by men who have a vital interest in their country, by men who have a firm, inherent, but modest pride in it, and who will uphold its good qualities rather than apologize for the traits that half-informed foreigners are pleased to discover and object to. Intelligent Americans are aware of the personal and national faults of the race; if they need assistance in having their shortcomings emphasized and pointed out, there is always a considerable number of foreign tourists, travellers and men of letters who are willing to lend themselves to this task with candor and enthusiasm.

It is difficult to determine what should be the tenure of office for a Consul. One great and, I think, universally acknowledged merit of the present system is that, by reason of the frequent changes, we get better work in the way of reports from our consuls than do those Governments which keep officers of this class per-

manently in their positions. It is essentially important that we should send abroad men with fresh eyes, and with the capacity of taking fresh points of view. This is a consideration which ought to receive due weight in extending the merit system to the Consular Service. It is one that cannot be ignored without the risk of rendering the service inflexible, cumbersome and inapt.

Our Consular System has been made the subject of a thorough, searching and scientific study by many of our commercial rivals, and the manufacturers, the merchants, the bankers and certain officials of Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy have been observing with jealous, watchful eyes the methods and achievements of the Consular Officers of the United States. In this work-a-day world, results furnish the accepted measure of success of a system, and of a governmental or business organization; and, measured by results based upon the observation and verdicts of our commercial rivals, the Consular System of the United States seems not greatly to suffer by comparison with that of any other country.

The trade journals of England and Germany have been commenting, freely, frequently and copiously for several years, upon the excellent work of American consuls. The high character of the commercial reports furnished by our Consular Officers was recently made a conspicuous subject of discussion by a member of the House of Commons, somewhat to the disparagement of the British Consular Service; and in a recent number of "*La Revue Diplomatique*," the organ of the French Diplomatic and Consular Service, are the subjoined keen and just observations:

"The Americans are practical men, and their instinct for business is marvelous. Nothing is more characteristic in this respect than the organization of their consular corps. Its duty is that of a sort of bureau of information at the expense of the State. It is recruited principally from journalists, who carry into their official career the trained instinct of observation, the quick grasp of passing events which belong to their former profession. They remain in close and sympathetic touch with their former readers.

"In some countries, the official printing office leisurely prepares the proofs of consular reports. These are returned for correction to the consuls, and when they finally appear they are no longer of interest. They are of an historic rather than a business character. But the American consul knows that his notes will go without delay immediately to the public, and he gives in them, like a good reporter, information down to the latest hour.

"The American consul does not understand that he has a commercial situation to maintain, but always a commercial situation to conquer. His ingenuity is exercised to invent and find new markets,

and in his study of ways and means, he descends to the most minute details.

"For instance, the Americans have wheat to sell. The Consul at Amoy proposes to import it into China. But the Chinese do not eat wheat. They must then be taught to eat it. It is noticed that the Chinese *gargotiers* (cook-shops) form associations in which they readily copy or imitate each other. The consul suggests that some dozens of these be selected, wheat given them *gratis*, and they be taught to make a few cheap, simple dishes. The fashion would spread rapidly among the restaurants, and from there to the families. Here is an instance of imagination and, at the same time, of practical good sense. The Americans do not lack a certain sentimentality in business. Last year, at Caracas, they offered to the President a banquet where were served only dishes prepared from products of American origin. Enterprising and ingenious in the new countries, it is above all in Europe that the American consuls are active and aggressive. Despite their colonial conquests, the Americans have comprehended that the real struggle remains in the old markets; that there are great fields to be cultivated; that *there* especially is the hard school that will force them to manufacture and sell better than all others.

"They have commenced their industrial expansion by striking at the very heart of the old industry, in conquering the English firms in the Birmingham market. Their principles and rules are those of sport. The record must be beaten. Their consuls have won the admiration of the English.

"'The English merchants,' says a journal of Birmingham in October last, 'commence to ask why our consuls do not work in the same spirit as the American consuls.' These consuls interest themselves immediately after they reach their post in all that surrounds them, just as they did before, as journalists. That which they do not know, they learn. One sees by this that the Americans have the art of putting life and initiative into a career where other people rest upon routine and immobility."

In a recent number, *The Consular Journal and Great Britain* prints a leading editorial in which elaborate comparison is made between the Consular systems of Great Britain and the United States. The writer says, in part, that the present method of appointing United States Consular officers has very patent drawbacks.

"There is just the possibility that the system of rewarding political service may prepare the way for the entrance of men who are not altogether fitted for the post. The possibility, however, though existent, is not largely operative, for its legitimate presumption is that a man who has distinguished himself in politics must be a man of the world, and possessed of tact and common sense. It is certainly an objection, though, to the scheme, that, just when a man is accustomed to his surroundings, and has so to speak, learnt his way about, he should be obliged to pull up his roots and abandon the Consulate, whose duties he has performed so well.

"We cannot say, with the experience of our own Consular Service to guide us, that the alteration suggested in the States would be altogether beneficial. A lad, fresh crammed from college, might be able, in an examination, to beat a man whose business tact, commercial experience and desirable personality renders him an ideal Consul. Besides, in our own service there is altogether too much of caste. There is, if anything, too much of the security of tenure principle about our own service. The Consul by no means keeps up his acquaintance with commercial England. In the majority of cases, he may have had no business training or experience, and yet, on the strength of his superficial 'cram' knowledge, he is chosen for the post. But not only does this weakness in the system of the selection of our Consular officers reflect discredit upon the Foreign Office, it shows that other nations obtain much better and more reliable work from their officers than we do.

"Thus, a Consular officer of the United States' Government is, to begin with, not so well paid as ours. But still, for all that, the work achieved by him is certainly superior to that done by our Consular officers abroad. He is, in fact, the servant of the officials and the people, and neither let him have many idle moments. He must prepare exhaustive lists of important shipping and commercial statistics. He must be constantly on the alert to discover new trade tendencies, and then he must exhaustively report thereon, and of such importance does Congress think these advices that they publish them daily as soon as received. Under all these circumstances, it is plain that the perfect Consular Service is neither with us nor with the Americans. Certainly, if the present system of 'spoils' is departed from, there is more than a probability of 'social successes,' 'tea and tennis men,' finding their way to the ranks of Consuls, to the certain prejudice of the Service."

The same journal also prints this note:

"What is Expected of German Consuls.—Under this heading, the '*Central Zeitung für Optik und Mechanik*' says that all the other countries of the world are left far behind in respect to Consular enterprise by the United States. In Italy, for example, the Consuls have begun a campaign in the press in order to get American goods into favorable competition with German and Swiss merchandise on the markets of Turin, Rome and Messina. 'Their knowledge is more general than that of our Consuls, and our Government would do well to choose its Consuls as the United States do theirs—widely informed men, ever awake to the commercial interests of their country.'"

It seems, after all, that our system has its good points and that the tenure of service may be too long.

I have always been in sympathy with the idea of the merit system and have welcomed every sensible and effective effort to advance the policy of Civil Service Reform, but I prefer to see these things from the practical point of view, and our attempts at reform have not always been either sensible or practical. Frequently, too much has been attempted and the onward march of



reform has thus been delayed. I think this is true in respect to our foreign service. Many excellent bills, looking to its radical reorganization, have been introduced in Congress, but they have been too sweeping in their provisions. The men who do the active work in politics and who reap large rewards, seem not to be quite ready for a complete reorganization of the foreign service of the United States. Systems do not change in a day. We cannot pass with facility from the present organization to the merit system without preparation, experiment and ample time for adjustment to the new order of things. I think it is neither selfishness nor lack of patriotism which moves Senators and Representatives in Congress to oppose the immediate application of the merit system to the whole of our Foreign Service. Every intelligent public man feels that this just and essential reform must come, but many of those in Congress and in other official stations would like the change to be gradual enough to enable Congress to devise the best possible system to meet our peculiar needs and conditions.

It is not at all certain, as I have suggested, that Consular officers should be appointed for life. There are many important phases touching the question of "tenure" to be considered, and details to be worked out, before a complete change can be made. It seems to me there is much to be said in favor of an experimental method of reform for two reasons: (1.) because it will teach us much we need to know, and will make our course in the future plainer and easier; (2.) because it is impossible from a practical point of view.

Consent by Congress to the appointment of a limited number of Consular officers even for life could probably be obtained.

As a step toward putting our Foreign Service upon a permanent basis, the appointment is suggested, for a term of ten or fifteen years or for life, of ten Consuls-General, fifteen Consuls of the first class, twenty-five of the second class and forty Vice-Consuls. These men should be appointed only after an examination which should be a genuine test of their fitness for foreign service, and among the requirements should be the power to speak one or more foreign languages with facility. The law should provide that not more than one-half of the Consuls and Vice-Consuls should be appointed from the same political party, and preference should be given to those who have served with distinction, and to those now in the service who have the highest records for effi-

ciency. Consuls-General should be paid seven thousand five hundred dollars a year; Consuls of the first class five thousand dollars a year, Consuls of the second class three thousand dollars a year, and Vice-Consuls from twelve to eighteen hundred dollars a year, according to the length of their term of service and the importance of their post. The Vice-Consuls should be what are known in the service as "independent Consular officers," and they should be placed in charge of what are now the smaller Consulates. The adoption of some such plan as I have very briefly outlined would furnish the nucleus for the reorganization of the Consular Corps on a permanent basis. It would enable us to work out, in a small and comparatively inexpensive way, the system of permanent organization most accurately adapted to our unique and manifold needs, and would reduce the patronage now furnished by the foreign service by about twenty-five per cent. It would be a distinct gain for reform, a practical forward movement from which there could be no retreat.

An essential feature of this proposed arrangement would be the empowering of the Secretary of State to shift the Consular officers about at will, in short, to use them in such places and in such manners as he might deem best for the interests of the Government. Lack of this power is one of the main faults of the present system. Sending foreign-born citizens back to the country of their origin as Consular officers of the United States is another practice long in vogue, which in many cases has given very bad results. Consuls who are appointed for a long term of years should be brought to the United States for a period of four or five months every third year for a course of work and instruction, and they should be assigned to our technical and commercial schools and colleges for purposes of delivering lectures on foreign commerce. It seems to me they might render a very important service in this way, and at the same time be gaining in touch and sympathy and community of interests with their fellow-countrymen, and informing themselves concerning the latest needs and developments in the world of business and commerce.

The Consular Service will be reorganized in all probability long before the Diplomatic Service is submitted to that much-needed and important process. There exists now, as ever, need for at least a small band of trained diplomatists who could be called upon as specialists to act in emergencies, and who could be at the

disposition of the President for any service he might require. We have one high official in the Department of State who has given the best of his life to the public service, who has had wide experience both abroad and at Washington. No Foreign Office in the world has an abler or more efficient Under-Secretary, and it seems to me that there is a lesson to be drawn from the great usefulness which long service, wedded to natural ability, has enabled this official to attain. It would be a safe experiment to appoint for life six or seven Ministers Plenipotentiary. These men would form a permanent, trained Diplomatic Corps which could be used for ordinary service and for special commissions. Their appointment would be a strong "hint toward reform," and would in no wise tend to embarrass the foreign policy of any administration, because the President could be authorized to assign them to such service as he pleased. He would still have the absolute appointment of about thirty Ministers. There should also be appointed for a long term of years, or for life, about twenty well paid Secretaries of Legation.

The Government of the United States is expending a truly vast amount of energy, talent and money upon the task of expanding its foreign commerce. The Department of State, the Treasury Department, the Agricultural Department are daily, monthly and annually pouring forth for the information and instruction of American producers and shippers a copious stream of pertinent and often invaluable information. No foreign Government in the world is doing so much for its merchants, manufacturers, shippers and producers of all classes as the Government of the United States is doing to-day. The work of the Government is supplemented by that of many business organizations and associations, and our foreign commerce is advancing with mighty strides, yet I think it is a fact that only a very small percentage of the manufacturers of the United States have established direct relations with foreign markets. The majority of them think it is not worth while, and are entirely unwilling to divert, in the slightest degree, their attention and efforts from the splendid home market at their doors.

I am always greatly surprised and annoyed at the notion, set forth by divers business men in this country, that our export trade is seriously limited by reason of the inefficiency of the Consular Service. This is not quite true. Undoubtedly, the Consular Service,

if it were reorganized and more efficient, would be a still more potent factor in expanding our foreign commerce, but if that branch of commerce is not as large as it should be to-day the fault lies not with the Government nor with the Consuls, but with a certain class of inefficient business men who are not clever enough to take advantage of the splendid opportunities which the Government, through the medium of its Consular officers, is almost daily pointing out to them. I regret to say that many of our manufacturers who enjoy a reputation for sagacity and business ability in the United States, when they attempt for the first time to send goods abroad, make the effort in a manner so unintelligent, so feeble, so lacking in the spirit, insight and mastery of the trade conditions which mark their efforts at home, that the attempt is foredoomed to failure. The average American manufacturer will not patiently and intelligently study the needs and conditions of foreign markets. He will not adapt his ways and his wares to them, nor will he send competent salesmen abroad to introduce his goods. He will not conform to the buying, selling and credit system of foreign countries; and he obstinately refuses to admit that there is any other sane or successful system of doing business than the American way. I am not making an exaggerated statement. I know, from personal experience, that there are scores of so-called intelligent business men in the United States, who expect to introduce their goods abroad and to create a demand for them by sending to the Consul for distribution a box of circulars or catalogues printed in English. There are manufacturers who send large sample lots of their goods abroad, and neglect for more than a year to furnish their foreign agent with either the cost or selling prices. This impotent sort of effort cannot compete with the steady, persistent, patient work of the German, English, French and Italian exporter.

The European merchants come, for instance, to South America, and they come with capital. They look upon a venture there in the nature of a permanent investment. From their home offices and counting-houses and factories, they send young men to be trained in South American business methods, to learn the needs and opportunities of the market. These young men see what the South Americans want, and when they return to Europe they are able to supply every demand which exists in that field of trade. The foreign Consul plays his part too. He assists his country-

men, suggests business opportunities and protects their interests; but he does no more than any good American Consul would do, and generally does do; the difference is that the European producers are systematically and energetically seeking foreign trade, and they have the courage of their convictions and of their capital. If we want to get something out of a country, we must put something into it. Europeans learned this vital commercial truth long ago, and they have been applying it in South America for a quarter of a century.

From a practical point of view, the Consular Service of the United States has been impaired by a well-meaning, but premature, abolition or abridgement of certain fees which Consuls used to receive for services of a semi-official or notarial character. What is known as the "fee system" of payment is open to many objections, for it has afforded opportunities for irregular and excessive charges; but the objections or evils of the "fee system," as it relates to the Consular Service, have been overrated and magnified in a wholly unwarranted manner. This has sometimes been done through impatient desire for positive, definite action of a reform character.

Some of the fees formerly received by Consuls have been suppressed, and some have been made payable to the Government, instead of being added to the income of the Consul, as was formerly the case. To any unbiased mind it should be obvious that fees, which are not, after all, in themselves a reprehensible form of income, ought not to be reduced or abolished until compensation for income thus curtailed can be made in the way of increased salary. At least sixty per cent. of our Consular officers are insufficiently paid, and grave inequalities exist in respect to the Consular salaries as a whole. Many worthy, hard-working Consuls, who have duties of a responsible character to perform, are most inadequately remunerated, and are unable to support their families in moderate comfort upon the slender salaries which Congress allows them. Even the capable, broadly-experienced Chief of the Consular Bureau is wretchedly underpaid and it is largely through patriotism that he sticks to his important, ill-requited task. By reason of inadequate compensation, it is a matter of great difficulty to find good men for all the Consulates. It is true that there are few vacancies, but it would be better to leave a post unfilled than to have it filled unworthily.

There is many a Consular office, the incumbent of which receives a salary of fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars a year; formerly in addition to his salary he received fees, which added, probably, a thousand dollars a year to his income. These fees were, of course, largely paid by foreigners having business relations with the United States, and as these foreign producers are making large profits annually from their export trade with the United States, it seems to me they should be allowed to contribute something to the service which is, in a measure, maintained for their convenience, though, of course, that is not its chief or primary object.

I know a score of Consuls who are so sadly underpaid that they are forced to live shabbily, and are subject to divers humiliations by reason of their inadequate income. These posts, in common with many others, are becoming untenable for men of high character, by reason of the small pay and the ill-advised tinkering with fees, on the part of well-meaning persons who had no power whatsoever to make the slightest advance in salaries, as an offset to the loss through fees which have been prematurely abolished or reduced, and always, save in a few exceptional instances, in the name of reform. I should be glad to see all unofficial fees abolished, but simultaneously with that act I hope to see salaries decently increased and equalized. Until this can be done, let us cease cutting off fees and calling the act which seriously cripples the service a measure of reform.

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